

XERISCAPE MYTH BUSTING:

Exploding Some Troublesome Misconceptions

Jim Knopf
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Xeriscaping is all good news. There is no downside. It saves water. It typically costs far less both to build, and to maintain than "traditional" landscapes. It attracts charismatic critters while discouraging wildlife mischief. It provides many great business opportunities. It offers new ways to provide year-round beauty. It is the best way ever to make gardening great by being something to do, rather than to be done with. It is simply all good news. However, many myths and misconceptions discourage people from reaping the rewards of this wonderful waterwise way to landscape.

Myth Busting

Myth #1 Xeriscapes are **dry only...NO!**

The original meaning of the word xeriscape was simply waterwise, or water-efficient landscaping. Even though dry-only landscaping can be spectacularly colorful and even lush, limited areas of highly watered landscape are completely consistent with wise water use, if the return justifies it -- for example, heavily irrigated athletic field turf.

Myth #2 Xeriscapes are **rocks and gravel only...NO!**

Although dry (xeric) rock gardens can be truly marvelous, there are an unlimited number of other choices for the xeric portions of xeriscape designs, even in the driest climates.

Myth #3 Xeriscapes are **lawnless...NO!**

Some lawn can be consistent with the concept of overall waterwise landscaping... "Less-lawn, not lawn-less" is a more appropriate phrase.

Myth #4 Xeriscapes are **native only...NO!**

Although there is a vast array of wonderful native plants for any region, introduced plants that are well-adapted, and not invasive, are an important addition to native flora for waterwise landscapes.

Myth #5 Xeriscapes **cost too much to build and maintain...NO!**

Xeriscapes can cost far less both to build and maintain than traditional landscaping which is usually dominated by high cost, manicured lawns that must be mowed weekly. A good waterwise landscape can be designed to avoid expensive automatic irrigation, and the money saved can be used for more plants. Many xeriscape designs need little or no regular maintenance, then maintenance by putting becomes a wonderful reality. Xeriscaping actually saves money!

Myth #6 Xeriscapes are **a single style...NO!**

Xeriscapes can be any style. There are lush tropical xeriscapes, fascinating Sonoran desert xeriscapes, delightful Rocky Mountain xeriscapes, eastern woodland xeriscapes, formal, and informal xeriscapes. Xeriscaping is not a single style.

Myth #7 Xeriscapes are **difficult...NO!**

Xeriscaping is not difficult. In fact, it can be easier than traditional landscaping. Trying to create a manicured lawn on a rocky site, is far more difficult than creating a ground

cover area with vines planted in only a few spots on the same site. Xeriscaping can be truly easy. Xeriscaping might mean learning a few new things, but that's not a downside, and it can be both easy and a lot of fun.

Myth #8 Xeriscapes **need plants you can't get...NO!**

There are more than enough xeric plants for xeriscapes. It is never hard to get shrubs like junipers, or rabbitbrush, or flowers like iris or penstemons, or ground covers like snow-in-summer. Plants for xeriscapes are just as available as plants for "traditional" landscaping.

Myth #9 Xeriscapes **need more water to get started...NO!**

Most plants in good xeriscape designs need less water (even the first year) than it takes to satisfy established high water landscapes. In fact, many low and very low water plants need only be watered when first planted. Even Turf-type Tall Fescue and Buffalograss sod need less water the first year than it takes to satisfy established Bluegrass. Overall, most parts of most xeriscapes need less than half the water of established high water landscapes, even the first year.

Xeriscape: Wow...It's Wonderful!

The program, "Xeriscape: Wow...It's Wonderful!" illustrates what xeriscaping looks like in lots of typical situations, and in many climates. It includes a study showing the dramatic savings possible during construction. Another study illustrates the dramatically reduced irrigation and water bills from simply changing the plant selection.

When it's important to save water in landscaping, the first and most important thing is to put plants of similar water needs together, and then avoid excessive irrigation.

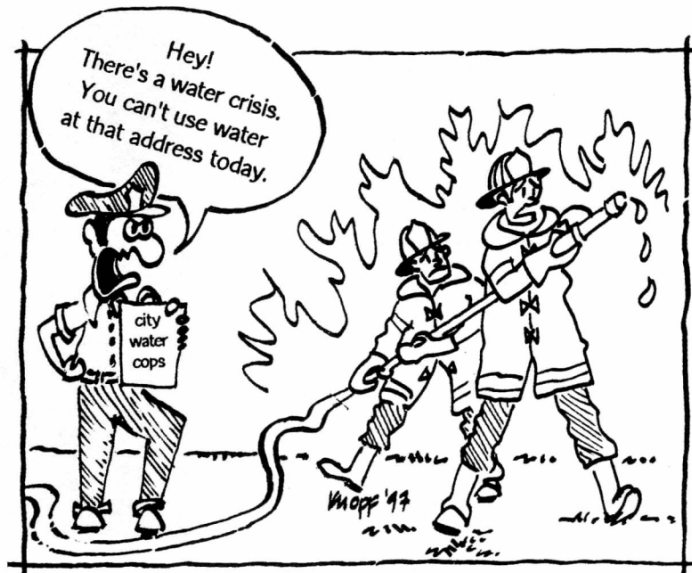
The following information illustrates how plants can be grouped in Denver or Salt Lake City. The same thing can be done in any climate by adjusting the number of zones, and the actual amounts of water needed, based on local experience.

How Much Water Does Landscaping Really Need?			
The following chart shows how to divide landscaping into different zones, based on the water needs of plants. Numbers illustrate typical Denver & Salt Lake City conditions.			
High Water Zones	Moderate Water Zones	Low Water Zones	Very Low Zones
Bluegrass turf (always wet at surface)	Half of Bluegrass turf (like Turf-type Tall Fescue)	Buffalograss turf (like Denver without irrigation)	Too dry for any turf (drier than Denver & SLC)
18-20 gals./ S.F./season .5" -- 3 times per week	10± gals./S.F./ season .75" -- once per week	0-3 gals./S.F./season .5" per 2 weeks, optional	No irrigation No irrigation
Typical plants: Kentucky Bluegrass, Redtwig Dogwood, Pansies	Typical plants: Turf-type Tall Fescue, Potentilla, Purple Coneflower, many shade trees	Typical plants: Buffalograss lawns, Rabbitbrush, Mexican Hat Coneflower	Typical plants: Piñon Pine, Yuccas, Apache Plume, Agaves, Penstemons

The program will also show how this information can be used to create designs that satisfy specific water budgets (or allotments). Water budgets can then be used to assure proper watering. Increasingly, water budgets are being required in the dry Southwest, and

are enforced by monthly meter readings, with penalty pricing for excessive irrigation. Water budgets are very popular with both customers and water departments. Compared

with daily and hourly restrictions enforced with water cops, water budget programs save more water and provide customers with much more choice about landscaping. During extreme droughts, residents and cities can save critical landscapes like sports fields and trees, by eliminating watering in some areas and focusing water on the most critical things.



**Xeriscape your yard, and help save water
for really important things.**

To reap the benefits of xeriscaping, it's necessary to practice waterwise landscaping in both dry and wet times. It's always a good idea. Xeriscape...It's all good news.

"Industrial-Strength" Perennials... Season-long Waterwise Color, and Deer Resistant Too!

Knopf Mar., '03

The perennials on this list are so durable and showy that they are useful for general landscaping. Among other things, they can be used for showy "filler" plants while shrubs are maturing. By consulting the blooming time list, it is possible to make selections that will provide color throughout the growing season.

For a list with month of bloom for each species, see
WaterWise Landscaping with Trees, Shrubs, and Vines
Jim Knopf, Chamisa Books

Alphabetical "Shopping" List

Achillea filipendulina 'Coronation Gold' (VL-L)	Coronation Gold Yarrow
Achillea x 'Moonshine' (VL-L-M)	Moonshine Yarrow
Agastache cana (M+/-)	Double Bubble Mint
Aster porteri (VL-L)	Porter's Aster
Aurinia saxatilis (L-M)	Basket-of-gold

Berlandiera lyrata (VL-L)
 Callirhoë involucrata (L-M)
 Centranthus ruber (L-M-H)
 Cerastium tomentosum (L-M)
 Crocus spp. * (L-M)
 Datura meteloides (L-M)
 Delosperma cooperi (M+/-)
 Gaillardia aristata (L-M)
 Helianthus maximiliani (M+/-)
 Iris bucharica (M+/-)
 Iris germanica cvs.. (L-M)
 Lavandula spp. (VL-M)
 Liatris punctata (VL-L)
 Limonium latifolium (L-M)
 Mirabilis multiflora (VL-L-M)
 Narcissus spp. (L-M)
 Nepeta x faassenii (L-M)
 Penstemon pinifolius (L-M)
 Penstemon strictus (L-M)
 Perovskia atriplicifolia (VL-L)
 Phlox russeliana (M+/-)
 Phlox subulata (M+/-)
 Salvia azurea var. grandiflora (L-M)
 Salvia officinalis (L-M)
 Santolina chamaecyparissus (VL-M)
 Saponaria ocymoides (L-M-H)
 Scabiosa ochroleuca (L-M)
 Silene laciniata (M+/-)
 Tanacetum niveum (L-M)
 Zauschneria arizonica * (L-M)
 Zinnia grandiflora (VL-L)

Chocolate Flower
 Poppy Mallow
 Centranthus
 Snow-in-summer
 Crocus species
 Sacred Datura
 Hardy Pink Ice Plant
 Native Gaillardia
 Maximilian Sunflower
 Bucharra Iris
 Bearded Iris varieties
 Various Lavenders
 Dotted Gay Feather
 Sea Lavender
 Native Four O'clock
 Daffodils
 Faassen's Catnip
 Pineleaf Penstemon
 Rocky Mountain Penstemon
 Russian Sage
 Russel Phlox
 Moss Phlox
 Pitcher Sage
 Cooking Sage
 Santolina
 Soapwort
 Yellow Pincushion Flower
 Mexican Campion
 Silver Tansy
 Arizona Zauschneria
 Prairie Zinnia

Criteria for selecting plants in this list:

- Deer resistant (exceptions are noted on the alphabetical list with *)
- Low water requirements (like Buffalograss turf, or as noted)
- Long-lived
- Complementary bloom times
- Showy from a distance